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THE HOMELY VIRTUES

JOHN WATSON D.D.



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ORDINARY PEOPLE

ORDINARY PEOPLE



IT sometimes occurs to one that as there are so many philanthropic societies in our day and another would make no great difference, it might be useful, as well as kindly, to establish a society for the protection of ordinary people. Its subjects would be all persons above the age of twenty-one who had never written a book, nor a magazine article, nor a pamphlet, nor a letter to *The Times*; who had never stood for Parliament, nor addressed a political meeting, nor taken the chair at a charitable

gathering, nor moved a vote of thanks to a speaker; who do not hold any view entirely their own on the doctrine of the Christian Church, or the origin of the Bible, or the relation of the sexes, or the division of property; who are not distinguished players at anything, nor brilliant conversationalists, nor wickedly sarcastic, nor unprinted poets—persons, in fact, who do their daily duty, and pay their debts, and act a neighbour's part, and speak about the weather, and go to Church; persons who are not original nor brilliant nor erratic, who are neither inventors nor reformers nor cranks, nor anything else except law-abiding, tax-paying, housekeeping, kind-hearted citizens—commonplace people. They endure great wrongs in our day, and no one is trying

to redress them, although the world is going crazy with sentiment. No great man of letters has commonplace people within his horizon (although Scott and Dickens had a tender regard for them). The modern writer elaborates for the elect who can admire his precious style ; thoughtful preachers talk over the heads of plain folk, and address themselves to what are called the thoughtful, who are understood to be always wrestling with high-class problems or giving themselves to amazing missions. Art, if the painter wishes to save his reputation with superior critics, abandons scenes of homely life and simple human motives, and labours on pictures which have to be explained like prize puzzles and might as well be painted for the Martians as for the average man

of this world. The ordinary person is ignored and browbeaten and made to understand that his conversation is a stupidity, that he himself is a weariness, and that unless you can sparkle, however feebly, you have no reason for existence. The ordinary person feels his position, and, although it may seem amazing in a creature of lower organization, is quite as sensitive as the bright people who have the wonderful ideas and say the striking things. It is pathetic to hear him explain, if he be up in years, that "we old fogies are out of it now," and that the young people know everything ; and if he is still young, that he is "not a clever chap," but that there is "no use my trying to take a hand in conversation." Yet the old man may have done a good day's work in the

world, and the young fellow may have a level head, and both may be of far more value than people whose tongues never cease and who have a windmill in their heads. So I want to make a plea for ordinary folk who are good and for ordinary ways of goodness.

It is a consolation for an ordinary person to remember that he belongs to the vast majority of his race, and that if he be outdistanced in talk, he will succeed in the vote. Out of a hundred thousand inhabitants in a city only a handful would be recognized upon a public platform, and out of that handful some were not known yesterday, and will be forgotten to-morrow. The great man of one town may never have been heard of in the next town; his fame does not extend two

stations along the line. A few men have a national reputation, but it is always a question of argument whether this or that great name will survive its generation. A century in history only adds some score of names to the immortal roll of the ages. When the generations pass across the stage of time, we only identify a face here and there—a Moses, an Alexander, a Paul, a Luther, a Cromwell, a Napoleon, a Washington, a Newton, a Darwin, a Faraday—and the others, perhaps great in their day and doers of great marvels, are now reduced to shadows, to the level of the unknown.

Perhaps an ordinary person may find comfort in the fact that, after all, nameless people have done some of the great works of human history. Who made the

first flint knife? Who first cultivated the land? Who first constructed a boat? Who first lit a fire? Who invented the alphabet? Who first struck on the idea of numerals? Who first established government? Who carried out the first barter? Who built the first house? No one knows, but those were the great inventors and pioneers of the race, and beside their achievements many great discoveries which have won men fame and rank are not worthy to be compared. What is the inventor of a reaping machine to the man who first sowed seed? Or the inventor of the steam engine to the man who first put out to sea in his own boat? Besides, when you come to extraordinary men, who write their names on the pages of history and before whom we all justly bow, how do

we know there was not an ordinary person behind them who has to divide the credit? Bunyan gave us the *Pilgrim's Progress*, but we do not know the names of the good old women whom he heard talking about religion as they sat in the sun, and whose words gave a new direction to his life. Lord Shaftesbury will long be held in honour in England for the social reformation that he wrought; but place, if you please, Lord Shaftesbury's nurse, who taught the lonely child the principles of godliness. The hall rings with applause when a distinguished scholar obtains his degree, but what of the country schoolmaster who first inspired him with the passion for learning? The multitude talk of a distinguished career; they do not think of the man's father, who toiled and

9 saved and sacrificed himself that the lad might have his opportunity. What of the great man's mother, whose name is not buzzed about in the market place? A very ordinary woman, yet she was the mother of this distinguished man. She nursed him, she trained him, she comforted him, she inspired him; it is possible that this ordinary woman, as you judge her, gave him his brains. He stands upon her shoulder, and is seen of all men, while she is unseen. Every famous life is raised upon the lives of others, as a Venetian palace rests upon the piles beneath the water. What, also, one may ask, could the extraordinary people do without the ordinary? It is the enthusiasm of a nation which places a statesman in power and enables him to carry out beneficent laws.

It is the patience and courage of the common soldiers which give the victory to the general. It is the skill and intelligence of artisans which secure the success of the capitalist. It is the audience, eager and responsive, which inspires the poet. The prosperity of a country depends on the millions of people who are doing their tale of work every day, bringing up their children in respectability and religion, and discharging humble household duties and resisting every-day temptations; the trend of national life depends upon what a multitude of people are thinking and feeling and wishing and striving; and the goodness of the commonwealth is made up of the character of an innumerable number of undistinguished folk. We may not be philosophers, nor travellers, nor

statesmen, nor conquerors, yet we ordinaries have our own sphere. We are the soldiers in the army which won the battle ; we are the multitude to whom the thinkers spoke ; we are the voters by whom the statesmen legislate ; we are the force of which historians write. There are thousands of volumes containing the record of births in the archives of the registrar-general, and the keeper is accustomed to show a celebrated entry here and there. But all the pages of all the volumes are filled with names, and each name represents a person who has been born into the world, and, in many a case, has lived to old age and has done his piece of work. Without this nameless and innumerable multitude there had been no work and no race.

Can any one be sure who is doing the most valuable and lasting work, or how the accounts are to be struck at the close of the day? Does it follow of necessity that a woman who makes clever speeches on the platform is rendering greater service to her generation than the house mother, who has guided her household well, and secured the peace and comfort of home to her husband and children? Can the minister who preaches to thousands in the great city be certain that he deserves more of the Church than his country colleague who is quietly building up the character of young men who shall by-and-by make the strength of the city? Is a brilliant writer a greater gain to the commonwealth than a silent merchant who has extended its commerce to the ends of the earth and

filled a thousand homes with plenty? It is impossible to say; it is not necessary to make comparison; it is sufficient to remember that fame may not always mean value, and that the soundest work in the world may be done by obscure people.

When all has been said, it remains that the one thing we are called upon to do, and the one thing for which we shall be judged, is our duty. There is some particular work which lies to every one's hand which he can do better than any other person. What we ought to be concerned about is not whether it be on a large scale or a small—about which we can never be quite certain—nor whether it is going to bring us fame or leave us in obscurity—an issue which is in the hands of God—but that we do it, and that we do

it with all our might. Having done that, there is no cause to fret ourselves or ask questions which cannot be answered. We may rest with a quiet conscience and a contented heart, for we have filled our place and done what we could. The battle of life extends over a vast area, and it is vain for us to inquire about the other wings of the army; it is enough that we have received our orders, and that we have held the few feet of ground committed to our charge. There let us fight and there let us die, and so fighting and so dying in the place of duty we cannot be condemned, we must be justified. Brilliant qualities may never be ours, but the homely virtues are within our reach, and character is built up not out of great intellectual gifts and splendid public achievements, but out

of honesty, industry, thrift, kindness, courtesy, and gratitude, resting upon faith in God and love towards man. And the inheritance of the soul which ranks highest and lasts for ever is character.

STRAIGHTNESS

I

STRAIGHTNESS



IT seems a far cry from the fifteenth Psalm to a modern exchange, and the circumstances of the East long before Christ, and of the West in our day, are very different. Yet it is a suggestive fact that the moral judgment of a Jewish psalmist and a Western merchant agrees to the letter upon the description of a man of honour. No doubt the psalmist, with his genius for religion, states the case for decision after a more impressive fashion—"Lord, who shall

abide in Thy Tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy Holy Hill?" and the merchant would rather ask, in our secular form of speech, "Is he the right kind?" It is natural for the Jew to inquire who is fit for fellowship with God, and natural for the Anglo-Saxon to ask who is fit for fellowship with men. But it comes to the same thing in the end, for if a man's morality gives him entrance to God's Tabernacle, he will be welcome in any respectable human society; but if a man be cast out on moral grounds from such society, he may not hope to dwell in God's Holy Hill. The Old Testament writer would call his ideal man righteous, which is one of the lordly words of human speech, and we, in our anxiety to keep clear of cant, would prefer to sum him up as

straight ; but let us understand that this familiar term, handed about among old and young, religious and non-religious, is simply the homely equivalent of righteous. An idea, like a soldier, has its parade uniform and its working dress, and straight is the undress of righteous. Righteousness in the Old Testament is not a theological, but an ethical word, and has to do not with a person's creed, but with a person's character. The righteous man of the Psalms is the righteous man the world over, in every exchange, every club, every society, every workshop. And in calling righteousness by the name of straightness, we have acclimatized this noble quality in the speech of modern life.

There are two types of men, and by their comparison we can remind ourselves

what is meant by straight. There is the man who may be clever and interesting and good-natured, and even, in a sense, pious, but on whom you may not depend. If you ask him an inconvenient question, he will prevaricate in his answer, and you will find that his words have a double meaning, so that while you wait for him at the front and, as you suppose, only door of the house, he has sneaked out at the back door. If you make a bargain with him, it will be your wisdom to have his proposal in black and white without delay, since the chances are, if the market goes against him, he will assure you, with many a profession of regret, that you misunderstood his figure. When goods are delivered by this man, it is absolutely necessary to verify every quality by the sample,

since, through some carelessness on the part of his people, an inferior value is apt to be sent. If he asks for assistance in some emergency, you may take it for granted that his affairs are much worse than he has told you ; and if he succeeds in borrowing money, he will have a hundred excuses for not repaying it. Should his firm be compelled to stop payment, very strong remarks indeed will be made upon the condition of his books ; and if he becomes bankrupt, the chances are he will be refused a discharge. When he plunges into a controversy, he will misquote his opponent's words, or wrench them out of their context ; and when he played games at school, he came as near cheating as he could. He is tricky, shifty, smooth-tongued, double-faced, not straight.

Over against him there is the man who may be plain in manner, and blunt of speech, and slow in understanding, and who, perhaps, may make no profession of religion, but who can be depended upon at all times, in every word he speaks and in everything he does. His smile may not be so taking nor his style so plausible, but he looks you in the face and his words have the accent of sincerity. He means what he says and he says what he means, and if you quote him, you will never be left in the lurch. He may be long in coming to a decision and he may be hard in a bargain. When the bargain is made, whether by word of mouth or a nod of the head, just as much as by a letter which has been copied, he will stand by it, though he lose his last penny. He will not whine

about his losses, for they are the fortune of war, nor will he brag about his honesty, for he expects that to be taken for granted. If you have to meet him in debate, he may press you hard and be very keen in his views, but he will always deal fairly with you, looking for the sense of what you said, and not taking any advantage of the words. If he has a quarrel with you, he will have it out with you face to face, and would scorn to slander you behind your back. He also may be unable some day to pay his debts, and that will be the bitterest trial of his life; well, he will work night and day to regain his prosperity, and then he will pay his creditors, every one, with interest. Never was he known to make capital out of any doubtful point in a game, for, though he was eager

to win, he was still more determined to win like a sportsman. And this is what we mean by a straight man.

There are many things for which one may fairly criticize the world, and by that I mean the people who do not profess to be religious; but let us freely acknowledge that they have at least one good quality, and that is an honest appreciation of straightness. The man who cheats at a game, who goes back upon a bargain, who shirks the post of danger, who filches away another doctor's patient, who exposes a woman's frailty, who brings up the catastrophe in a man's private life, is despised and cast out by the world. The pariah of the world is a sneak, and for him there is no more mercy than for a rat. Upon the other hand, while one firmly believes that

the Church of Christ sets upon the whole an example of unparalleled virtue, yet one is haunted with the feeling that the Church has not always laid enough stress upon righteousness, in the Old Testament sense of the word, and that she has given the idea the cold shoulder. She has enforced the commandments which touch on piety and on purity ; she has not given so clear a sound upon the commandment of truthfulness. If any man denied the creed or if any man was a gross evil-liver, the Church, except in her worst times, would deal strictly with him ; but if he were simply dishonest and disingenuous, mean and tricky, she has been apt to let him alone, so that he came to feel that she did not care, and his own conscience was lowered. Perhaps one might go further,

and say that crookedness has been a religious sin and has almost had the sanction of the Church, although it has ever received the manifest judgments of God. Abraham was the father of the faithful and a noble type of religion, but Abraham lied to Pharaoh with just that kind of lie which finds its shelter beneath the shadow of religion. He played upon words, saying that Sarah was his sister, which, in a sense, she was, but allowing Pharaoh to understand that she was not his wife, which of course she was. It was not a downright falsehood, but a guarded and calculated departure from the truth, a policy in which the religious conscience has shown itself an adept. There is a kind of man who will not drink nor swear, who believes in the deity of Christ and the

eternal punishment of the wicked, but who has no more idea of personal honour than a fox, and who will do things at which a high-class man of the world would be aghast. We are inclined sometimes to think that if a man be religious he must be straightforward, and if he be straightforward he must be religious. But we have leaped too hastily to a conclusion, for there are people with a genuine sense of religion who are as crooked as a corkscrew, and there are people who would never dream of calling themselves religious, but yet they are as straight as a die. As, for instance, Jacob in the one class, and in the other such a man as the Duke of Wellington among Englishmen, and Abraham Lincoln among Americans.

Nothing has brought such scandal on

religion in public life as the dishonesty of a certain kind of religious people who will call themselves by the name of Christ, and take part in religious meetings, and set themselves up as censors of morals, but who betray the trust of poor investors, and bring banks to ruin, and start bogus companies, and make discreditable bankruptcies, and obtain possession of the means of relatives and trustful people, so that every decent man condemns them, and, when they are not cunning enough, the law fortunately lands them in prison. With their mixture of Phariseeism and duplicity, with their cant and their lying, such people are a reproach and a byword, and are ever being flung in the face of religion. While they are praying and preaching, young men are declaring

everywhere that it is because of them they are not Christians. If the Old Testament gospel of morality had been more stringently preached, the Church would not have been cursed with the presence of men who have dared to speak for her, but whom neither God in His Holy Hill, nor the world in her market-places, can tolerate, because they do not walk uprightly nor work righteousness.

Nor has the Church as an historic body established so high a claim as one would like for straightforwardness. Why is it that priests have earned so bad a name and been so keenly hated by the people? Why has one order been expelled from nearly every country in Europe, and has often brought cruel persecutions upon its fellow Christians? It were a slander to say that

all priests are bad, since many have been men of singular devotion and of vast sacrifices; but it is a fact that, as a class, priests have been less than straight. They have used words in a double sense; they have practised the doctrine of reserve; they have invented astounding excuses for falsehood; they have brought casuistry to the height of a science. One of their chief characteristics has been that rat-like cunning which Browning illustrates in the priest of the *Ring and the Book*. Whether called priests or not, all ecclesiastics are tempted to be crafty and diplomatic. They make up catching motions; they devise subtle schemes of policy; they are afraid of exciting prejudices; they are fond of ambiguous words. Certainly no one has ever said

that they were simple and guileless. There are fair grounds for saying that while the Church has taken the intellectual failing of heresy and made it into a sin, she has condoned the moral failing of trickery and almost raised it to a virtue.

Has it ever happened to us to have a dispute, say, about a statement we have made, or about a matter of business, or about family affairs, or even about a game with a man of the world, and he told us plainly that we had acted dishonourably? Not illegally—which is a different matter, and has to be tried by a different standard—but dishonourably, as between man and man, when tried by the working code of straightness. If he was wrong it was a bitter moment

that he should have thought so badly of us; but if he was right was it not ghastly? What did we do in that moment when the light was suddenly turned on in the cellar of our souls, and we saw the loathsome creatures of darkness making for their holes? Did we acknowledge our sin to man and God, or did we try to justify ourselves, and afterwards—which is the cheapest thing that we could do—pretend that we were martyrs for religion's sake? When Pharaoh told Abraham to his face that he was a liar, it was one of the lamentable paradoxes in the history of religion, for in that hour Pharaoh stood higher than Abraham before the conscience of men and in the sight of God.

If any one be conscious that he has a taint

of crookedness in his blood, and that he is inclined to play tricks ; if he has already been exposed and put to shame because he did not speak the truth, and his hands were not clean, let him face the situation and bestir himself. There is nothing but contempt and humiliation in store for the dishonourable man at the hands of the world, nothing but self-reproach and self-loathing within his own soul. His own wife, try as she may, will not be able to respect him, and his children, as one thing after another becomes plain to them, will be ashamed of him. And whatever he believes and however he prays, there can be no welcome for him with God, who is the fountain of truth and righteousness. The thoughts of men are often foolish and their judgments vain ;

but, after all, they honour straightness. The ways of God are often dark and past finding out, but of one thing we may be sure—the blessing of God rests upon righteousness, both in this world and in that which is to come.

THOROUGHNESS

II

THOROUGHNESS



WHEN one's position is assured he can go where he pleases, and as thoroughness will appear in many humble places before this chapter is ended, it may be well to remind ourselves at the beginning that it holds high rank in the religious life. Our Master was inspired by this principle when He would allow no disciple to turn Him from the Cross, and ceased not in His high endeavour till He had finished the work which His Father gave Him to do. He

was severe upon impulsive profession without stability of action, and He gave His highest praise not to brilliant ability, but to faithful service. His commandment unto His followers was to be faithful unto death, and His promise a crown of life. St. Paul exhorts his converts to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, and declares that all the energy of his life was gathered to a point, "this one thing I do." One of the chief conditions of victory in the Kingdom of God is thoroughness.

The same law runs in ordinary life, and he only need expect to attain success and win the honour of his fellow men who is thorough. The reason why men fail is, in five cases out of six, not through want of influence or brains, or opportunity,

or good guidance, but because they are slack ; and the reason why certain men with few advantages succeed, is that they are diligent, concentrated, persevering and conscientious—because, in fact, they are thorough. One sees every day the story of the hare and the tortoise repeated, when the bright man is outdistanced by an unpromising competitor, because he is self-confident and erratic. An irregular swiftness has no chance in the end of the day against the pace which may be slow, but is unresting. As the conditions of labour in every department of human life become more exacting, there will be no use for the shiftless and incapable men. His preserves, where he can mismanage and not be punished, are growing fewer every year ; neither a merchant, nor a college

tutor, nor the Church, nor the public service will tolerate him soon; the day is close at hand when even the English army will have none of him, and the last resort of brave incapables will be closed. Society is beginning to demand that whatever a man professes to do he must be able to do, or else Society will wash her hands of an unprofitable servant. If the slack man does not mend his ways, he will have to go to the workhouse.

People conceal their inherent slackness from themselves by all kinds of ingenious excuses. When they are caught tripping in their own department of knowledge it is because their minds are so taken up with principles that they cannot keep hold of every minute detail, or they blame their treacherous memory—as if their minds

were simply crammed with goods, but this tricky servant brought the wrong article. When they miss an engagement or have not finished their work in time, it is due to the multitude of their affairs. As if we did not know that the busiest man is usually the most exact and the idlest man has his time most crowded. When things come to the worst, they fall back on absent-mindedness, which, as they secretly imagine, is associated with genius, and ought to place them beyond criticism. No doubt there are people who seem to have been born without the faculty of memory, just as there are people who are born blind, and there are other people in whose mind there is a loose wheel, just as there is a certain proportion of our fellow men in lunatic asylums ; but, as a rule,

those excuses, when they are boiled down, simply come to persistent and culpable slackness.

Thoroughness can prove itself in various ways, and not least by honest thinking. It is not good to be a bigot, and to give no credit for intelligence to our opponents, either in politics or in religion; but there is something worse than bigotry, and that is instability—to have no opinion except what is pumped into you by your neighbour, or to have one opinion to-day and another to-morrow, or never to rise above opinion, and to reach conviction. This type of man is neither Liberal nor Conservative, neither Republican nor Democrat; in England he is said to have a cross-bench-mind, and in America he is called a mugwump, and in neither country does he receive any great

measure of intellectual respect. His indecision may be due to a certain quality of mind which never can come to a conclusion, and never can take a side strongly, but the chances are that want of conviction means intellectual indolence. Surely it is our duty to think out the great subjects of life to our furthest limits, to form our creed by the best light God has given us, and having won our creed, to live and defend it. Let us believe something with all our might, and while the best thing is to believe in Christ and to be a thoroughgoing Christian, the next best thing is to believe, as St. Paul once did, another creed, and to be true to it, for the day will come when God will give to the honest thinker more light, and he will be all the braver soldier of Christ because he had been a

brave enemy. We would respect ourselves more and be stronger men if we could only take our stand somewhere, and, where we stood, be prepared to die.

Thoroughness should also brace our habits in daily life. No doubt there is an accuracy which is niggling and a regard for order which is slavish ; there is also an inaccuracy and a disorder which disfigure life from morning till evening ; and to escape being a Pharisee in this matter one need not be a publican. Some people seem to have made a rule of unpunctuality ; they are late in rising, late for meals, late for trains, late for engagements, late even for pleasure ; they are exact and accurate in one thing only—in being so many minutes behind time. They are dull of hearing in the morning, their watches are ever going

slow ; beyond all other people they are detained by unexpected visitors or sudden duty. No one may depend upon them ; they are a trial unto their friends and the scorn of their enemies ; and the cause of their shame is slackness. There is the woman who is always badly dressed, without neatness and without taste ; and when you see a woman with unmended gloves and a torn dress, you may be sure that she is an incapable housekeeper and a helpless wife, for if a woman has not spirit enough to keep her dress in repair she is bound to be slack in every duty of life. There is the man who writes so badly that he is convinced himself that he has a literary gift, in which case the profession of letters has the easiest condition of entrance and the largest number of members among all

the departments of human activity. Illegible writing is a slovenly habit for which no excuse can be offered except want of education, and its punishment falls on innocent people, on postmen, on clerks, on busy professional men, and on friends who cannot understand the news which has been sent. The school, large or small, which does not teach its boys to write should be marked inefficient, and the people who will not do their best to write legibly should be classed with the illiterate.

Thoroughness should be vindicated in the work to which we have been called and by which we have to be judged. If we play a game, let us strive to play it well, and not be a "footy"; if we undertake a piece of work, let us finish it to the last jot and tittle. If we profess a subject of

knowledge, let us have it at our finger ends. If we take up a scheme, let us see it through; and if we choose a side, let us play the man. There is honour for the man who can be trusted to the end and whose work does not need to be done over again, who can always be found in his own place, and will always do what is expected of him. There is continual dishonour for the person who is slipshod and unreliable, and fickle and lazy, for he is like the reed which pierces the hand that leans upon it. Nowhere is thoroughness more needed than in religious work, nowhere is slackness more prevalent. There are Christians who serve Christ as diligently and faithfully as they do their earthly work, and they shall not miss their reward; but many of Christ's servants would not be tolerated for a week

by any other master. The poorest joint-stock company in the land is better served by its directors than many congregations are by their office-bearers. There are no teachers anywhere so ignorant and so casual as certain Sunday-school teachers; there is no clerk in a dry-goods store dare treat his duty as lightly as some of the voluntary officers of the Christian Church. They will absent themselves without leave and without excuse; they will never inquire how their work is being done or whether it is done at all; they will not take the trouble to prepare themselves to do it, and they are not concerned when it fails in their hands. They will place their pleasure and their fancies, and their social engagements, and their imaginary ailments before their Christian duty. And it would be difficult

to say how little must be the burden, how short must be the time, that they would be willing to count an obligation upon them and would be prepared to face. One is sometimes inclined to propose a general resignation of the Christian staff, and then an invitation to all who are prepared to do Christ's work as well as the work of the world is done, and it might be that three hundred thoroughgoing men like the Band of Gideon would do more for Christ than ten times the number of irresponsible casuals.

And thoroughness takes its highest form in character, where slackness is a germ of destruction. One of the most disappointing and dangerous people in society is the man or woman who is agreeable, and plausible, and sparkling, and amusing, but in-



sincere, changeable, and unprincipled and facile. There is no disloyalty, no baseness, such a person may not be capable of, not so much because he is immoral, but because he is slack. You must not count him a friend, since he may cast you off tomorrow; you must not assume he will stand temptation, since his character is weak at the foundation. Character is the ground of trust and the guarantee for good living, and that character only is sound which rests upon a good conscience and a clean heart and a strong will.

What one fears is that a slovenly habit of work may in the end mean a slovenly soul, for character is established by action. As we carry ourselves in an innumerable series of acts from morning till night, doing our work slackly with detached mind and

nerveless hands, or doing it thoroughly with a scrupulous conscience and full purpose of heart, we are either building our house upon the sand, and the first flood will sweep it away, or upon the rock, against which the fiercest flood will beat in vain.

KINDNESS

III

KINDNESS



It seems as if there were a fashion in virtues as in dress, and that private kindness were more at home in the past than in the present. The generation which is bidding us good-bye, and whom in our superior moments we criticize, was not ashamed of generous emotions. Our fathers met their fellow creatures upon a basis of unaffected cordiality; they took an affectionate in-

terest in the affairs of their friends; they were still capable of shaking hands. Their faces gave proof of the warmth within; they did not pose nor use falsetto adjectives; they were sincere, straightforward, warm-hearted. Our generation is apt to receive its friends upon a stage, with the gesture and expression fixed by the rule of fashion; it is shocked by any outbreak of human feeling, and will smile feebly when wished a Happy New Year, as if apologizing for a lapse into barbarism. It conceals affection and suppresses feeling, although practising little tricks and artificial moods for dramatic effect. Amid this cant of up-to-date language, this smart attitudinizing, this "perfect devotion" to a hundred different people, this calculated rapture over an

incident which is forgotten next minute, this studied enthusiasm for a cause taken up by some great lady, this wearisome hypocrisy of manners, one longs for the unconventional simplicity and the reality of other days. We grow weary as we hear the note of conversation taken from a pitch fork, as we see faces arranged for an occasion, and then disarranged again to be ready for the next scene. We welcome as a relief the veriest Philistine with a heart in his bosom and no fear of man before his eyes, who grasps our hand like a man and drives us before him in the joy of meeting.

The depreciation of kindness in private life, which is one of the features of our day, is very largely due to the fashion of intellectualism, but yet human nature

below the surface of crazes and phrases remains the same, and his fellows still judge a man by his heart rather than by his head. When the jury is selected, not from a coterie, but from the marketplace, the person who is kind will ever be preferred to the person who is clever, and "thoughtful," to use a cant word of our day, is still less than warm-hearted. Walter Scott and Dickens will ever have a larger hold upon the people than Hardy and Meredith, not because their art is finer, but because their spirit is kindlier. An affectionate child is more welcome than those monsters of modern precosity who furnish their foolish parents with sayings for quotation, and who have worn out all healthy sensations at the age of ten. The girl who is honest,

unaffected, considerate, good natured, still receives the prize of respect and of love. No young man is better liked than he who has a genuine interest in the aged and little children, in poor lads and in weak people. People mention with pathetic delight that although such and such a man be so able, yet none is more mindful, and here it is interesting to note how the mind is brought under subjection to the heart, for when we say mindful we do not mean intellectual, but helpful. Women who create around them a quiet and genial atmosphere will never want for grateful subjects. Hot temper is condoned by the world if there be in the man a heart of love yet greater than the passing flash of rage. People will put up with hasty words and discourteous

actions for the true heart which is behind them, and will remember the shining of the sun long after they have forgotten the thunderstorm. Many a sinner against God and man has been forgiven both in heaven and earth because he loved much. No cleverness and no success can redeem heartlessness. People who are not constant and sympathetic, who are showy and affected, may imagine that they are admired—they are really detested. The chief crown of life is the love of your fellow men, and that is ever given to those who have a heart.

If any one should think that the value of kindness is exaggerated let him remember its moral quality. Why is it that some people are unkind? Usually because they are hard or cynical, or

thoughtless or worldly. In short, because however ready may be their flow of sentiment or graceful their manners, they are at the core thoroughly selfish. They do not help their neighbours, because they are always engaged furthering their own personal interests; they do not feel for their neighbours, because their own joys and sorrows absorb their whole stock of emotion; they do not think about their neighbours, because their one imperious subject is themselves. They are the slaves of a masterful egotism, which thinks and feels and acts in terms of self; to which the world is but the stage scenery for a single character and other men only a chorus. What does it mean that a person is kind? That he remembers other people, that he is

not bound up with his own affairs, that he is capable of making sacrifices, that he is willing to serve his fellow men. It means that his heart is not of stone, but of flesh, that his spirit is not of the world, but of Christ. Religion may be tested by many virtues, but it may be safely said that its surest proof is kindness. One may be pure and honest and industrious, but if he is not kind he is so far less a Christian. One, on the other hand, may have many faults, but if there be in him a pitiful and friendly heart, he is so far a Christian. He who shows not mercy, it is fair to argue, has never tasted the mercy of God, and he who never thinks of his brother has never realized how God has thought of him. While he that loves proves that

he has been loved, for love is of God, and he who helps proves that he has been helped by Jesus Christ. When we rate kindness as a form of facile good humour, we are depreciating this virtue; it is nothing else than the love of God in common life.

“For mercy, pity, peace, and love,
Is God our Father dear;
And mercy, pity, peace and love,
Is man His child and care . . .

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew.
Where mercy, love and pity dwell,
There God is dwelling, too.”

Another reason why we ought to make much of kindness is that unkindness contributes so largely to human misery, and kindness to happiness. There are the major and the minor trials of life, and

the major trials, thank God ! do not come often, although their shadow may remain for years. We are apt to think that they are beyond human consolation, and yet the mourner will tell you that in the day of sore distress he was greatly comforted by a letter, by a word fitly spoken, by a call at the right time, by a little attention. The heart is lonely in the straits of life, and is thankful for company ; it is wounded and bruised, and welcomes the wine and oil. The good Samaritan is the proof of God, and the children of affliction learn that they have not been forsaken. There is no balm for sorrow, no re-enforcement for faith outside the Bible like your neighbour's kindness. Much of the sorrow of life, however, springs from the accumulation, day by day and year by year, of little

trials—a letter written in less than courteous terms, a wrangle at the breakfast table over some arrangement of the day, the rudeness of an acquaintance on the way to the city, an unfriendly act on the part of another firm, a cruel criticism needlessly reported by some meddler, a feline amenity at afternoon tea, the disobedience of one of your children, a social slight by one of your circle, a controversy too hotly conducted. The trials within this class are innumerable, and consider, not one of them is inevitable, not one of them but might have been spared if we or our brother man had had a grain of kindness. Our social insolences, our irritating manners, our censorious judgment, our venomous letters, our pin-pricks in conversation, are all forms of deliberate un-

kindness, and are all evidences of an ill-conditioned nature.

Is not the burden of life, with its labours and anxieties, temptations and bereavements, heavy enough without our voluntary additions? Why should our neighbour's temper be embittered, and his heart wounded, and his peace broken, and the limited joy of his life be reduced by our thoughtless deeds and by our foolish words, when we might have done so much to add to his joy and to help him along his way? Ought we not to make a covenant with ourselves and ask God to seal it with His blessing, that whether or not we be able to give large sums of money or to render great services, whether or not we be able or brilliant, that at least we will be kind from the time we rise to the

time we lie down—in our homes, in our offices, through our pleasure and through our work—to the people of our blood and to the people of our acquaintance? Let us resolve that if we are out of sorts, or if we have been disappointed in our work, we will not take it out of our neighbours, our wife and children, our servants, or our clerks; that we will not debate and wrangle in speech about politics and religion and a hundred other things of less importance, till every one is on edge; that if we know that a person has some fad, we will give it a wide berth and save our brother from himself; that if there be some innocent subject on which he loves to talk, we will be his attentive hearers. That if any one has had a success, we will make much of it; that if

any one has had a reverse, we will let him know that we also suffer; that we will never pass a friend without a signal of good will; that if we hear evil gossip we will immediately bury it, and that if we hear a good report about any one, we will blaze it abroad; that we will carry ourselves patiently with tiresome, irritating, sour, and uncharitable people. And to this end that we will curb our vanity, pride, and self-importance and evil temper.

Might we not also go a little further and resolve that every day we will do at least one act of kindness to some neighbour. Let us write a letter in such terms that the post will bring pleasure next day to some house; make a call just to let a friend know that he has been in our heart;

give a young man starting in business some bit of work to encourage him in his first year; send a gift on some one's birthday, or on his marriage day, or on Christmas Day, or on any day we can invent; exert ourselves to get a widow's son into a situation, or a lad into a school. If we have a carriage, let invalids have the use of it; if we have a box in the concert hall, let us remember that Providence has given some people the love of music without silver and gold; let us make children glad with things which they long for and cannot obtain. And a thousand other things which we could do within a year if we had eyes to see and a heart to feel, and had the will to take some trouble. If every one did an act of daily kindness to his neighbour, and refused to do any un-

kindness, half the sorrow of this world would be lifted and disappear.

What we mean to do let us do quickly, for life is short, and, as has been said, we shall not come this way again. The sun will soon be setting for every one of us, and we will be coming to the Master to give an account of the day's work and to receive His judgment. And we are going to be judged by nothing more or less than by our kindness or our unkindness. They who were kind shall go to the right hand—He said it who Himself is Judge—and they who are unkind shall go to the left hand, for inasmuch as we have done it unto the least of His brethren, we have dealt kindly with the Lord Himself.

THRIFT

IV

THRIFT



THE Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes is an illustration at once of magnificent generosity and of careful economy, and reminds us of the difference between abundance and waste. The guests whom the Master entertained were in number about five thousand, they had of the loaves and fishes simple, wholesome fare, as much as they would. When they were satisfied the fragments of broken bread and

unused fish were gathered up by the apostles and placed in baskets, and this was done according to the command of Christ that nothing should be lost. As Nature, with all her boundless resources and lavish display of beauty, yet skilfully and anxiously uses up every scrap of her material and refuses to recognize such a thing as refuse, so Jesus with the power of creation at His disposal will not allow that the remains of a feast be flung away, but insists that what has not been needed by His guests shall be kept for some poorer people. It is a convincing and authoritative application of the law of thrift.

Thoughtless people are apt to make a contrast between generosity and thrift, as if they are not more likely to be the complement of one another, and the reason of

their mistake is a misunderstanding of both ideas. Generosity such people confound with extravagance, and thrift they spell meanness, and so they conclude that if a man spends his money in every foolish whim and injurious gift, he is as large-hearted as he is open-handed. While if his neighbour makes conscience of every shilling which he lays out either on himself or on other people, and studies how he can best utilize the means of which God has made him trustee, that he is both close-fisted and lean-hearted. According to this view of it, extravagance, even in its more vulgar and ostentatious form, is a vice so splendid that it is equal to a virtue, and thrift, even when it is guided by the highest principles, is so petty and sordid a virtue that it is next door to a vice.

As there is no vice without a certain kinship to virtue, and no virtue which is not in danger of being sold into the slavery of vice, one recognizes that extravagance is with some men a proof of kindness, and that in some forms it is not without its attraction. When one bestows his benefits upon so large a scale that he gives far more than can be used, he may not always be blamed, for our Lord Himself did not limit Himself by the appetite of His guests, but made an overflowing provision with enough and to spare. There is also a thrift which is so cold and accurate that it seems to weigh every morsel in the scales of a chemist, and to be concerned about grains and scruples, and one is not drawn to the host who has studied his guests' appetites so carefully that when the feast is ended

the last loaf and fish are also gone. Waste is the shadow upon generosity, miserliness on thrift, and it is a grave question whether the wastrel or the miser is a greater curse to the community, but certainly the miser is the more unlovely character.

Thrift is like some misunderstood character in history, and has to be redeemed from opprobrium; and Carlyle, who removed the dust of many years from the portrait of Cromwell, and placed him where he ought to be, among the chief rulers of England, has also done his best to redeem the idea of thrift. He points out with much force that upon this despised and commonplace virtue, which superior people are apt to assign to hard-working peasants and little tradesmen, has been

built up great and strong empires. "For my own part, I perceive well there was never yet any great empire founded, Roman, English, down to Prussian or Dutch, nor in fact any great mass of work got achieved under the sun, but it was founded even upon this humble-looking quality of thrift, and became achievable in virtue of the same." It was to rigid economy, which sometimes no doubt touched the extreme of avarice, that Frederick the Great partly owed his power. It was to the saving habits of the French country folk, which no doubt are sometimes sordid and grinding, that their nation owed its recovery from the great disaster of 1871. And it is their simple life and careful use of means which has secured to the working people of Holland

and Switzerland their modest and contented prosperity. A great empire may be able to endure the strain of luxury for a while, either through the accumulated resources of the past or the immense riches of its land, which explains why Britain and the United States can be so wasteful as they are and yet be so strong, but it still remains true that thrift is the condition of continued prosperity for the State, and waste the destruction of a nation.

The laws which guide the affairs of a nation create also the character of an individual, and I doubt whether the superstructure of any character be sound which does not rest upon thrift as one of its foundation stones ; for thrift is not to be thought of as the mere accumulation and investment of money, it is the

evidence of certain qualities which are more precious than silver and gold. When you know that a family are thrifty, then they may or may not be clever, agreeable, good-natured, popular, but you do know that they must be industrious, honest, persevering, simple living. Thrift, if you go into the matter, proves foresight in the regulation of life, a steady principle of action, a constant self-denial in little things, and a certain willingness to endure hardships. It would be a rare thing indeed to find a thrifty person lazy, shiftless, unreliable, irresolute. You may take for granted that he will be clear of head and strong of will, independent of human opinion, and true to his own conscience. He cannot be soft who lives in this atmosphere; he cannot be weak

who has passed through this temptation ; he cannot be a fool who has so often had to say no.

Justice is seldom done to the thrifty, and a great deal more than justice is done to the thriftless. A curious glamour seems to surround the man who takes no thought about to-morrow in another sense than Jesus intended, who flings his money right and left in every form of social extravagance, who is hail fellow well met with every man upon a basis of meat and drink, and sport and pleasure, who does not deny himself anything which can minister to his appetite or his tastes, or which will tend to notoriety and display. People call him by various flattering names which all come to this—that he is the type of good nature ;

beside him the careful and saving man is counted to be niggardly, shabby, mean, and self-regarding ; and with the majority of people he would be discredited. But the soundness of a man's heart is not to be finally judged by the foolish tips with which he demoralizes servants and reduces them to flunkies, nor by his willingness to stand the cost of champagne and cigars, nor by his taste for expensive articles which he does not need, nor by the lavish scale on which he lives. Do you find in your experience that this man is as ready to give to the great causes of religion, and philanthropy, and education, and charity, as he is to spend his money upon feasts and shows, on purple and fine linen? Have you never discovered in this man of overflowing geniality and

reputed warmth of heart a remarkable reluctance to part with his substance for worthy and unselfish ends, and an amazing wealth of mean excuses when he is asked? Are you not haunted with a suspicion that at any moment this large-hearted man may embrace your purse in his affection, and this fine, open-handed fellow may open his hand not to give, but to borrow? And did you ever know this capital fellow to pay anything which you ever lent him? When he dies, is it not found, in nine cases out of ten, that he has made no proper provision for his wife and children, but has wasted on himself and his boon companions, or at best on his selfish habits of life, the money which ought to have secured for them a home and comfort? When the hat goes round for his family,

are you not tempted then to revise your judgment and to realize the hollowness of his character? Open-handed? Yes, to himself and the people that are like him. Not niggardly? No, except to those who have depended on him. Give the thrifty man his due; if he be not popular with the glutton and the wine bibber, he has some good points. It is he, I suspect, who gives the largest subscription on Hospital Sunday, not your light-hearted spendthrift, and it is his kind which maintains the great institutions of charity. You need not be afraid that he will sponge on you for money—he is not so mean as that; or that his widow will have to go out begging—he is not so shabby as that. If he practises self-denials which you may despise—taking a car instead of a hansom,

travelling third-class instead of first, going to a quiet hotel instead of to a fashionable one, drinking water instead of wine, it is he himself at the worst, and not you, who is going to suffer. It is not this man who will impoverish society, or tax his neighbours for the upkeep of himself and his family. If he lives simply he lives surely, also honestly and beneficently, and that no thriftless person ever does, or ever will do, while the world lasts.

It is not young men and women brought up in the practice of thrift, and accustomed to simple and wholesome ways of life, who are afraid to marry because they cannot have a large house, and surround themselves with expensive furniture, and indulge in a hundred luxuries, and begin upon the level where their father and

mother have ended. Marriage in what is called society is decreasing because young men and women are afraid, not of poverty, but of simplicity, and desire not comfort, but luxury, because they have not learned to save, and because they are not prepared to save ; and therefore many young women are growing shallow, and affected, and cynical, and fast, and many young men calculating, selfish, soft and vicious: Thriftlessness therefore has its Nemesis, though it seems the most venial of sins, in wasted hearts, which is worse than wasted money ; in worldly lives, which is worse than want of prudence.

Thrifty people consider together their ways and means, and keep their expenditure well within their income. It is not they who run into debt and have large

accounts with tradesmen ; who are continually receiving dunning letters, and have to humble themselves with false, cringing excuses ; who keep poor shopkeepers out of their money and bring them often to bankruptcy ; who if they pay anything will sooner pay their wine merchant than their doctor, and who if they had a little money at hand would rather make up a party for a horse race or a theatre than give it to the best cause that ever asked for help. Luxurious people often carry a high head, looking down on tradesfolk and on their quieter neighbours ; but at any rate it was the tradespeople who threatened them, not they the tradespeople, and if their neighbours be quiet, at least they pay their debts ; and I had rather be the green-grocer in my little shop who was cheated

than the fashionable woman in her carriage who cheated him.

Will people never understand that whether we live simply or extravagantly, whether we pay our debts at once or after several years, whether we use the means God has given us for selfish or noble ends, is really a moral question? The thriftless nation, the thriftless family, the thriftless person has broken one of the laws, both of nature and of Christ, and will suffer punishment in decadence of character, in loss of self-respect, and in callousness of honour ; while the frugal and careful man is blessed to-day with peace of mind and a good conscience, and the respect of those neighbours who know the difference between sham and reality, between truth and falsehood.

GRATITUDE

V

GRATITUDE



It is pleasant to come upon a cluster of Alpine flowers blooming amid a waste of snow, and it is with the same feeling one reads what the town of Jabesh-Gilead did for Saul in the iron age of Jewish history. It is one of the Idylls of the Old Testament. The connexion between this place in the rough country beyond Jordan and the King of Israel was established long before Saul

began his ill-fated career, and is a romantic story. The Tribe of Benjamin had so offended the rough conscience of Israel by sheltering shameless criminals that it was almost exterminated, and the survivors were forbidden to marry into other tribes. This meant that there would soon be a tribe less in Israel, and the heart of the nation was touched. Some expedient must be found to supply Benjamin with wives, and since Jabesh-Gilead had not joined in the war, and was supposed to be friendly to the offending tribe, the men of Israel seized four hundred young women of the place and handed them over to Benjamin. The women carried off in this fashion linked together Benjamin and Jabesh-Gilead, and a tradition of friendship was created,

something like that which existed, through marriage also, between the Scots and the French.

Pass about three centuries, and Jabesh-Gilead is in sore trouble. The ancient enemy of their nation had attacked this outlying, lonely place, and offered its inhabitants the alternative of hopeless resistance or a shameful humiliation. In straits, they bethought themselves of their hereditary kinsmen of Benjamin, and sent a swift embassy to Saul, who was already known as "a mighty man of valour." He came to meet them like another Cincinnatus from the plough, and on the hearing of their story the Spirit of God descended upon Saul. He killed his oxen, which he would never need again, and sent the fragments as a

fiery cross through Israel. The heart of the nation was stirred, and in a few days Saul was at the head of the army of Israel. He bade Jabesh-Gilead be of good courage, for help was at hand, and the people waited for him as the little garrison of Lucknow for their deliverers. Saul came and smote the Ammonites with such calculated skill, that there were not two of them left together. It was Saul's maiden victory and a splendid feat of arms, and so the old tie, rudely formed long ago, was re-knit by this friendly succour in time of need.

Pass some forty years now, and Saul's day of trouble has come, and the gallant king lies dead on the field of Gilboa. The Philistines were not generous foes, and Saul had been the hammer of their

race. When they found his body, they cut off his head, whom living they had been afraid to meet, and hung it in the Temple of Dagan ; they fastened his body to the walls of Bethshan, and placed his armour in the house of the Goddess of the Grove. Alas for Saul ! The armies of Israel were scattered, and David was in hiding. Who is to remember the fallen king and rescue his remains from insult ? There is one place where his memory is green and where mothers tell their children what Saul did for their fathers in the brave days of old. As soon as the sad news of Gilboa reached distant Jabesh, her valiant men resolved to do by Saul dead as he had done for them living. They made a swift night march to Bethshan, and brought away

the bodies of Saul and his three sons. They buried their ashes in a public place at Jabesh, and they made great lamentation over the king. Saul was laid to rest among the people he had saved, and he had the best of all monuments—the people's gratitude.

It is the custom nowadays to criticize the defective morality of the Old Testament, and nothing is easier than to make comparisons to our advantage between the ways of the generations past and our own. How fierce and revengeful, how callous and brutal were the heroes of Hebrew history in the fighting period! And so the modern, with his dainty sentiment and effusive philanthropy, is inclined to treat those hard-fisted fighters as savages; but he forgets the age they

lived in and the work they had to do. Without doubt painting is a more delicate art than hewing, but until the stone be quarried and cut there will be no walls to paint, and the men of the former days blasted the stone with sweat and danger and laid the strong foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness. It is easy for us at a later stage to decorate the rough-hewn walls which Ironsides built sword in hand, and to add the tenderer graces of Christianity to their more austere virtues. Are we certain that while we have gained we have not also lost, and that while we despise the past for its rudeness we have not allowed some of its strength to stay? There are virtues which belong to a golden age and are hardly possible in the age of

iron, and such are mercy and charity. Let us put those achievements of advanced civilization to our credit, but let us remember that the history of morals is not one of unbroken progress. The simpler times had their own virtues, which have not always been carried forward, and do not always take kindly to our climate. There are extinct animals and there are extinct arts. If we do not give heed in our softer days, there may come to be extinct virtues ; and one that is in danger of starvation amid the complacence and toleration of modern life is gratitude.

It was this way in the old days, to which we may transport ourselves at a time for change of air. If any one had done you or yours a bad turn with malicious inten-

tions, then you did not pretend to forget his injurious deed, but rather made it a matter of conscience to remember it. You followed your enemy with unwearied hatred, and when the opportunity came you paid him back with interest for what he had done unto you. If, on the other hand, any one helped you or yours in a strait of life, then were you bound to him with hooks of steel. You gave him the loyalty of your heart, and were ready at any time to stand by his side, and if God in His mercy afforded you the chance, you rewarded this man an hundredfold for the kindness which he had shown unto you or to your father. The history of Israel abounds with instances of traditional hatred, such as the vendetta against the Amalekites, whom the Jews slew without

mercy, because the Amalekites had fallen on their fathers as they went up from Egypt to the land of Canaan; such as the friendship to the Kenites, who must be spared because they guided the children of Israel on their march through the wilderness. What was done on the larger scale of national life has also been seen in many a transmitted feud and many a bequeathed debt of private life. Some may be living who can recall the day when people hated their enemies and loved their friends after the good old fashion, and perhaps they are inclined to thank God that a better state of feeling now obtains, and that we do not live in a state of perpetual feud. Certainly we ought to be thankful for every decrease in malice, bitterness, and revenge, and for the spread of a

kindly and forgiving temper. We must not, however, plume ourselves too much upon our charity, nor use that fine word "forgiveness" too loosely. If a woman is willing to pocket any past affront to gain an ignoble entrance into a higher social circle, and will accept an invitation from those who once insulted her, or if a merchant will do business greedily for the sake of a hundred pounds with a firm which did their best to ruin him in some crisis of trade, do not let us ascribe this poor spirit to the influence of Christ's Cross, nor count this meanness any improvement on the Judges who washed out their wrongs in blood and did not sell their forgiveness for a dinner or a purse of gold. It is cant to say that the average man of the world is more

merciful than our uncompromising forefathers ; he is more cautious, more politic, more worldly, more cowardly. Besides, we can never get rid of a vice without the risk of weakening its corresponding virtue. Granted, if you please, that we are less vindictive ; will any one say that we are as grateful ? Do parents inculcate the quality of gratitude upon their children as one of the leading obligations of life ? Are masters and servants bound together to-day by this ancient tie ? Does our popular literature exalt this duty as did the Hebrew writers ? Has not the worst cynicism of modern times been distilled into that proverb which is so often heard, "Gratitude is a lively sense of favours to come" ? Can any one deny that the sense of debt to those who

have rendered service either to our people or ourselves has weakened? Has it not come to this, that in the past men hated their enemies and loved their friends, but now we forgive our enemies and forget our friends?

There are three persons short of the Highest who have established upon each one of us an unanswerable claim of gratitude, and one too often forgotten is the public servant of the State. If any one surrenders his favourite tastes and sacrifices his time and devotes his talents to do for us, either in the Parliament of the city or of the realm, what must be done, yet what we cannot do for ourselves, are not we that man's debtor? Is it right to sit upon this man like a jury upon a criminal, to oppose the best thing

he wishes to do, because he does not belong to our party, though we be all of the same State, to embitter his life with insinuations, denunciations, and gibes, and to forget in some hour of popular disfavour his long, patient, faithful services? It is natural that people should have their political leaning; it is base that they should not vie in gratitude to every man, patrician or plebeian, who has done well by the Commonwealth, and who seeks no other reward than the approval of his conscience and the approbation of his fellow-citizens.

The second person can easily be found in any society, and perhaps most easily in a commercial city. You began life—let me put the case—poor and lonely, with no help save God's and the friend

whom He gave you. This man took you by the hand, and aided you with advice, introductions, business, and private kindness. It is an old story now, and the wheel of fortune has revolved, so that you who were poor are rich, and the one who was rich died poor. God has given to you the opportunity of showing the stuff of which your heart is made, and of tasting the sweetest pleasure within human reach—doing good to them who have done good to us. What care have you had of your benefactor's widow? What service have you rendered to his son? Have you been to them what their father was to you? Shame on the ingrate who could forget the friends of early days, or deny his debt of obligation! Shame on the woman

who casts off her old neighbours because she has got among richer people and stands a few inches higher in the social scale. There are none so true as the friends of our adversity, none so fickle as the friends of our prosperity.

And the third person to whom you owe more than you can ever pay or ever imagine, is your mother. She endured more for you, served you more patiently, loved you more fondly, thought of you more constantly, and hoped for you more bravely, than any other person you have known on earth, or ever will know save your wife (or your husband), if indeed they can always be excepted. If your mother be spared to you, then are you bound to make her a first charge on your life as you desire a peaceful conscience

and as you shall answer before the Judgment Seat of God. She must be encompassed with every observance of comfort, and honour, and gentleness, and love. With sacrifices also, if so be it will please her, of tastes, and occupation, and time, and even friendships, and after you have done all that you can think of and any one can suggest, you will still remain a hopeless bankrupt, for the love wherewith she loved you. If she has passed from this life, and is now with God, then keep the commandments which she laid upon you in your youth, though now you be a grey-headed man, and follow in her steps, even as she followed Christ. Honour all women and serve them in purity and chivalry for her sake, and may your tongue cleave to the roof of

your mouth and your right hand lose its cunning, may your name be blotted from the Lamb's Book of Life, and your portion be taken from among the inheritance of the saints, if while she is living you sin against your mother, or if she be dead you forget her love.

REVERENCE

VI

REVERENCE



R. BUCKLE, in that brilliant fragment of literature, *The History of Civilization*, has, no doubt, fallen into the vice of generalization, and is too apt to dazzle his readers by plausible conclusions, but he has sense upon his side in pointing out the influence of climate on the character of nations. It would be too much to say that to know a people's physical environment is to infer their religious creed,

for you would be hampered by an embarrassing wealth of exceptions, and yet the complexion of creeds has not been unaffected by scenery. Within the Catholic Church the worship of the Madonna has risen to its height in Europe with the degrees of the thermometer, being most reserved amid the northern Germans, most exuberant among the southern Italians. In no circumstance is it likely that the inhabitants of the steaming valley of the Nile could have as stern a faith as the lonely inhabitants of the veldt. Nor could one expect the same outlook upon religion from a Scots Highlander, living at the foot of hills along which the mists are moving, and on the edge of a melancholy ocean, as from an Italian, whose house

is set in an orange grove, where a blue, tideless sea breaks on the beach with gentle murmur. It is almost inevitable that the inhabitants of a soft climate should be touched with the spirit of joyful confidence and those of colder skies should develop a certain austerity of faith.

One may avail himself of Mr. Buckle's idea, and suggest that the religious climate changes with the generations, and has more bracing and more relaxing zones. It goes without saying that while faith in its essence must ever be the same, the particular standpoint of our fathers is not that of their children. They dwelt upon the depravity of human nature, the horror of sin, the holiness of God, the helplessness of the soul, the

sovereignty of the Divine Mercy, and the unsearchable purpose of the Divine Will, themes full of awe and majesty. Therefore did they humble themselves before God and cast their souls upon His pity. They sought anxiously for a ground of pardon, and searched themselves for signs of the Divine calling. They dared not boast of His favour, but they walked humbly before Him and hoped for His salvation. Theirs was an inward, intense, and lowly religion. We are inclined to dwell on the possibilities of human nature, the wide hope of the Incarnation, the revelation of the Divine Fatherhood, the compass of God's love, the full assurance of faith, the joy of the present life, and the glory of the life to come. Our religion is, there-

fore, more outspoken, unfettered, high-spirited. About the saint of the former day it was written, "he feared God"; but of our good man you read in his biography that he was a "bright" or a "happy" Christian.

It is futile to recall days which are gone, or to reproduce their moods, for the time spirit bloweth where it listeth, and, rightly used, it is the spirit of God. We have cause to be thankful, because we have learned not to despair of our race, to think of our fellow men as brethren, and to remember that a man has more to do in this world than save his own soul. Our religion is less morbid, gloomy, introspective, and selfish; but there are times when, looking out through the palms upon this expanse of

blue, one wearies for the strong salt air of the Atlantic and the grandeur of the hills when the sun shines through the mist. One is haunted with the conviction that if in our day we have gained joy and charity, we have lost in devoutness and humility, and that we have almost bidden good-bye to reverence.

Religious problems were once discussed with impressive seriousness by men who were standing in the holy place and speaking in the presence of the Most High. We prefer to discuss them in fiction, which seems sometimes to have no restraint and sometimes no decency, in the pages of enterprising serials, in clever dinner-talk over the walnuts and the wine. Once men prayed to God, as Abraham did for Sodom, with chastened voice, and humbled them-

selves before Him, like Isaiah in the holy place, and waited for Him as those that watch for the morning. Then the name of God was seldom used, and the soul was a sanctuary, into which none but its Maker had a right to enter, and religion might not be lightly handled in common talk. Religious people of to-day, in proportion to their fervour, allow themselves to shout the name of the Almighty without any term of adoration, to paddle among the sacred affairs of the soul with rude, intrusive hands, to introduce the Son of God into the squalid situations of common life, and to make allusions of ghastly familiarity to the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. It seems as if the curtain were being torn down from the holiest of all, and the place, where the glory of God rests

in human life, turned into a common street.

Can we wonder if religion has lost the saving sense of reverence? that its influence upon the people is failing? that the public worship of God is decreasing in every land, and that even if a crowd gather to hear a sermon, they will not come to pray? that the day of rest which God has given unto men, when once a week at least men may have quietness wherein to examine their souls and bring them into touch with the things which are unseen, is being crowded with business and pleasure? that the head of the household no longer builds his altar unto God, and gathers his family round it as they journey through this world to that which is to come? that the spirit of prayer, by which

the human soul is bound by golden chains unto the feet of God, is dying out from amongst us? that with every year a lower view is taken of the mystery of marriage, and fewer people seek the blessing of God upon that sacred act, which they are coming to regard as nothing but a civil contract? and, which is not the least calamity, that the bonds of filial piety are being loosed before our eyes, so that parents are ceasing to use their authority as the vice-gerents of God, and children do not pretend to render that becoming obedience which is one of the beauties of youth?

What strikes one trying to gauge the spirit of the day is an appalling want of gravity. Not only young or silly people, but almost every person is infected with a spirit of intellectual frivolity. Books have

had to give the second place to magazines, and serials themselves are being swamped by the most trifling papers. The drama has abandoned the nobler themes, both of instructive comedy and wholesome tragedy, and can find no other subject than the degradation of pure love and the ridicule of the marriage state. No subject, either social or political, is thought out with care and conscience till its principles be discovered, but is rather turned into a popular catchword or a mercenary appeal. And the mind of the people, untrained by thinking, and unwilling to listen to anything except clever, cheap, sophistical talk, is carried away now in one direction, now in another, and expends itself in gusty moods of unreasoning rage or ignoble enthusiasm.

Without reverence for the Eternal verities, many calamities must befall a people. And certainly without this fear no man can do lasting work. Mr. Stopford Brooke, in his admirable monograph on Tennyson—itsself one of the most beautiful pieces of literary work of recent years—insists that one of the conditions of Tennyson's eminence was his reverence. He was impressed by the greatness of his Art, and could not do anything slightly or unworthily. The masters of physical science, as distinguished from its second-rate compilers, have been animated with the same austere spirit—taking the shoes from off their feet before their burning bush, the mysterious and irresistible powers of Nature. He who is pert and forward, puffed up with slight attainments and un-

awed by the vastness of knowledge, will never come to any perfection nor be admitted into the secret place of wisdom. It is the student who stands before the house of knowledge, modest, patient, single-minded, conscious only of his own poverty and the unspeakable riches within, to whom Wisdom will open her gates, and on whom she will bestow her hidden treasures.

“ Make knowledge circle with the winds,
But let her herald reverence fly
Before her to whatever sky
Bear seed of men and growth of minds.”

Reverence is also one of the sure foundations of character, for without it one may indeed have many glittering and superficial traits of cleverness and ingenuity, of bright emotion and restless energy, but he cannot

have illumination of conscience, dignity of soul, sincerity of mind, and the highest purity of life. Nor is it likely that one can obtain the gracious qualities of sympathy, charity, and sacrifice. It is only as the soul is bowed before the things which are lovely that it will carry itself both bravely and tenderly. Do we realize how poorly we sometimes show besides the type of former days? "Benevolence," says one well able to speak, "uprightness, enterprise, intellectual honesty, a love of freedom and a hatred of superstition are growing around us; but we look in vain for that most beautiful character of the past, so distrustful of self, so trustful of others, so simple, so modest, so devout, which even when, Ixion-like, it bestowed its affections on a cloud, made its very illusions the

source of some of the purest virtues of our nature."

And reverence lies at the root of right living, for one of the first principles of conduct is obedience. If we do not learn when young the habit of respect, to honour our father and our mother, to obey those set over us without questioning or grudging, to give precedence to age, both in our speaking and our doing, to admit the sacred claim of suffering and affliction, and to bow ourselves before the highest rank on earth, the splendour of moral goodness, then for us no perfection of soul will ever be possible. For us there is likely in the future many a squalid defeat, and perhaps some irrevocable moral catastrophe. The irreverence of youth grows into the profanity and rebellion of later

years, and is the parent of anarchy, both in the family and in the State. "It is," says Ruskin, "his restraint which is honourable to man, not his liberty. . . . From the ministering of the Archangel to the labour of the insect, from the poisoning of the planets to the gravitation of a grain of dust, the power and glory of all creatures, and all matter, consist in their obedience, not in their freedom. The sun has no liberty—a dead leaf has much. The dust of which you are formed has no liberty. Its liberty will come—with its corruption.

"And, therefore, I say boldly, though it seems a strange thing to say in England, that as the first power of a nation consists in knowing how to guide the Plough, its second power consists in knowing how to wear the Fetter."

MORAL COURAGE

VII

MORAL COURAGE



MORAL courage is obeying one's conscience, and doing what one believes to be right in face of a hostile majority; and moral cowardice is stifling one's conscience, and doing what is less than right to win ^{another} other people's favour. It is a calamity both in Church and State that this ^{moral courage} high-spirited virtue is not more common, and that opportunism is so general. ^{are needed} Men ~~are wanted~~ everywhere with the courage of their con-

victions, who will not trim their sails to every popular gale, nor change their creed at any one's bidding, but ^{will} follow conscience through fire and water. Such stalwarts of principle like St. Paul telling the Corinthians that their judgment was a very small thing to him; like Athanasius standing alone against the world; like Luther declaring "I can do no other wise"; like John Knox steeling himself before the tears of a Queen, are rare in human society. What haunts one in political speeches is the idea that the speaker is not declaring the best thing he knows, but is tickling the ears of the groundlings. What pains one in many a sermon is the suspicion that the preacher must know more than he says, and that he has tuned his voice to the prejudices of

his people. What weakens the power of the press—that fine instrument for popular education—is the certainty that its leader-writers are perfectly aware of the ability and honesty of the other side, but argue as if they were fools or knaves in order to please their party, and the moral power of society is reduced by the large number of people who hold their consciences in subjection to social expediency. Your neighbour may have convictions which he has purchased with the blood of his heart, and for which, on due occasion, he would be ready to suffer, but you cannot be sure of the fact if it happens that his opinions are always those of the majority. As far as you can see he maintains an attitude of guarded neutrality, till it appears on what side the majority lies, and then

their opinion turns out to be what he has always held ; but if that majority should dwindle into a minority, your neighbour has a mind open to education. How many of one's acquaintances have grit enough to form a conviction on a matter of right, and to defend righteousness when unrighteousness is popular ? One in six is as many as could be expected, but it is not necessary to impute wilful dishonesty to the other five, or to suggest that they have outraged their conscience. They have simply trained their conscience to calculate by numbers, and to identify righteousness with the majority vote. They would not have hated Christ in the year thirty-three, ^{A.D.} but they would never have crossed the ^{multitude that} rabble which ^{called} yelped for His crucifixion. They are not bad people, they may be good-natured and

well-meaning people—they are simply without backbone—moral cowards!

Suppose, to make a study in moral cowardice, your friend has agreed with you in the morning to follow a certain line of action, because it is right, and there is not much difference among intelligent men about righteousness. An hour afterwards he meets A, who has a biting tongue, and ridicules your action. B, who is a very rich man, says a little later that he at least will have nothing to do with it. Later still C declares that it will be very unpopular, and hour by hour various letters of the alphabet attack, disown, and condemn what you intended to do. None of the letters represent much conscience, and none of the arguments touch the moral question, but they have the cumulative

effect of suggesting to your friend that if he does this thing he will be made uncomfortable. His resolution crumbles away before this flood, and in the evening the fashion of his countenance has altered. On thinking over the matter, he now sees some difficulty, and feels that it would be well to wait a little. You remind him that this is not a matter of expediency, but of justice. "Quite so," he says, "no doubt, but—" and he hesitates. You know then that he has been sending up kites all day to see how the wind is blowing, and that he has no mind to go in its teeth. It is a collapse of conscience, and your friend does not propose to cast in his lot with a minority of one. He shambles off inwardly ashamed, but he will not face that combination of letters. Germans in the middle

ages were terrified by a mysterious institution called the Vehm-Gerichte, which veiled itself in mystery, and administered a rude justice to wrong-doers. People's imagination was appalled at the thought of a body which surrounded them on every side, and took notice of their smallest action. The Vehm-Gerichte of our time is opinion, which by its potent and intangible influence holds most people in bondage. In the Church it is called orthodoxy (or it may be heterodoxy); in politics, party; in society, fashion; in trade, custom. Its authority lies in combination and impersonality. Our fellow men, taken one by one, are not very impressive personages, neither much wiser nor much better than ourselves, but let them slip on the mask and mount the judgment seat, with this

sanction, "people say," and the average person makes an abject surrender.

Moral courage has four degrees, and the first is not to be afraid of ^{one's} your opponents. This is really no great attainment, for ^{one} he does not deserve the name of man who can be browbeaten by scolding or threatening. Insolence of this sort is not unwelcome, for it stiffens resolution and rouses pride, and delivers one from the snare of compromise, and sets one with his back to the wall. If one is to be tried, let him pray for an unscrupulous and venomous antagonist. It is a higher degree of courage not to fear your friends. ^{many people} Hundreds who are ^{and who} as strong as a rock to resist those who hate them are as weak as water in the hands of those who love them. Oh, the sorrow of it that we should be tempted to do some-

thing less than what is right by those whom we trust, and hindered from doing the highest thing we know by those who love us most. Many a woman shrinks from duty for fear of her husband—the amazement on his face ; many a husband falls beneath himself for fear of his wife—the amazement on her face. So they who have stolen our hearts sometimes also steal our courage. He is braver still who does not fear the Cross of Christ ; who has no secret clauses in his treaty with Christ about truth or duty ; who puts no personal inclinations, no family ties, no class customs, no business profit above Christ, who will follow anywhere when Christ leads, and do anything that Christ commands. But the highest courage of all is not to be afraid about one's self. Is there

any more admirable instance of manliness than St. Augustine's searching out the mistakes in his writings, and recanting them before he died, for there is nothing we are more concerned about than our reputation, nothing we are more unwilling to do than to confess that we were wrong. When any one is brave enough to unsay the worse for the better, then surely he is a true man, and will stand fast for righteousness.

Certain people have special need of moral courage, and one is a young man in the city. His safest plan is to bid good-bye to compromise, and not to burden himself with an excess of courtesy in the hour of temptation. A tempter is most quickly daunted when he is most roughly handled. Have nothing to do under any excuse with

drinking men, is sound advice ; allow no fool to blaspheme religion in your hearing ; come down upon the beast who tells an evil story ; cast your shield over the weak comrade who is ready to fall. There are times when a hot temper and a sharp tongue are good servants to the Kingdom of God, and when war to the death is the wisest policy. The second person is a woman in society, for women are apt sometimes to be sad cowards. They are afraid to dress as their best friends would like to see them, because it would be unfashionable ; afraid to give simple dinners, because their neighbours are extravagant ; afraid to allow their daughters to work for themselves, because it might lower their station ; afraid to give a children's party without wine, because they might be thought stingy ; afraid to

have their poor relations in the house, because of the servants; afraid to be economical, because of the same critics. They are in bondage to all kinds of people, from their rich neighbour to their housemaid. One wonders that some woman does not pluck up courage and say, "I don't care what people may think, I am going to do what I judge to be right." If she only dared, that woman would find a dozen in her circle to follow in her steps, and her courage would reinforce the moral capital of a district. And a third person is the member of a poor Communion, who needs courage that he may not deny his faith. If any Christian discovers that his soul will be better cared for in another than the church of his nativity, then let him emigrate at once, for religion is more

than churches. But for a man to desert the church in which he was bred for no other reason than that another is more fashionable, is being ashamed of your mother because you have risen in life, and comes very near to the sin of Judas Iscariot. It reveals a character of soul unfit for Christ's kingdom, and this mean spirit, if it spread, would poison religion in its life-blood. Such treachery inflicts a double injury, embittering the church the coward leaves with a sense of wrong, and infecting the church he joins with a suspicion of worldliness. Every man ought to make conscience of his faith, and he who is true to his church, although the sun be not shining upon her, even unto the loss of position and goods, has given the surest pledge that he will be faithful to his Lord

and be a good citizen of the Commonwealth.

The vindication of moral courage is in the judgment of God, and when any one stands alone for conscience' sake, we do not well to be angry with him, and we must not be found fighting against him. If his conscience be overscrupulous, then let us see that we deal gently with him and give him more light—rendering thanks to God that the man has so much conscience, and remembering that no community can have too much among its members. If the man's conscience be sound, then as we would not war against God Himself, let us be careful not to injure this witness. He may be a reformer before the Reformation, running like John the Baptist to make the way for Christ;

he may be a trustee, holding a moral heritage for our children; he may be a sentry, keeping watch where the enemy will creep in the darkness. It matters nothing that power and numbers, as well as the voice of the mob, are against this man. Their verdict is neither infallible nor final; St. Paul has the better of Felix now, and Luther of the Diet of Worms. What do they think of this solitary man yonder whence they can look down and see this world

“Spin like a fretful midge”?

What if the principalities and powers of God, if the great cloud of witnesses, and the multitude no man can number, are with this lonely confessor? He dared to say “right,” and his poor voice is drowned for the moment by the clamour

of the world ; but let no one think it has been silenced, or is ever going to be silenced. His word proceeds upon its journey through the illimitable reaches of space ; it gathers force as it goes, where the brawling of foolish men has long died away ; it is echoed from one world after another as it passes, and at last reverberates from the Throne of the Most High, like the sound of many waters. This is the Magna Charta of moral freedom ; here is a ground where the weakest may stand alone. We are not the subjects of some petty province, we are the citizens of a greater Rome. If Jewish courts denied St. Paul his rights, or Roman judges forgot justice, then he had his own proud resort : “ I appeal unto Caesar,” and once those words

had passed his lips none dare do him hurt. It was to Caesar he had appealed and to Caesar he must go. So from the petty customs and passing opinions of this world the righteous man makes his appeal to the Judge of all, and if God shall justify him, it is a small matter although the whole world has condemned him.

COURTESY



VIII

COURTESY



WHEN Matthew Arnold was preaching culture to the Philistine multitude with all the zeal of a missionary and some of his inevitable narrowness, he used to complain that people imagined culture to be simply some slight smattering of Greek and Latin. And when one pleads for courtesy, one is afraid that people may suppose that he is simply meaning manners. Mere manners are a code of

etiquette which varies in different countries and with different ages, so that what is rude in France may be usual in England, and what we consider foolishness in the West may be the custom of the East. They constitute a body of rules which condescend upon the most trivial affairs—how it becomes us to eat and drink, to dress and carry ourselves, to speak to persons of another rank, and to perform public functions. With this sum of minute and varying regulations the teacher of religion has nothing to do, because it has no ethical value, and may be safely left to those remarkable books in which an immortal being is instructed how rightly to address a letter to a baronet, or how he ought to use a finger glass at dinner. All the

same, it is foolish to flout the customs of society, for they are intended upon the whole to make life more agreeable, and to compel a rude person to observe decency of demeanour; but a vast distinction must be drawn between manners, which have to do with form, and that which lies behind manners and is infinitely more serious—courtesy. One has known many people whose manners, through the disadvantage of early days, or through a certain desultoriness of nature, were open to frequent criticism, and yet he has loved them for their goodness. One has also known people who acquitted themselves perfectly in every situation of social life, but who were treacherous, cruel, selfish, and evil-living. Certainly manners in

the common sense do not make the man, for Charles II had an almost irresistible charm of personal address, and George IV was called the first gentleman in Europe, while I fancy there have been many prophets and apostles who would have come to grief amid the ways of a court. Are we not in danger of being biassed in our judgment of our neighbour by his outward carriage, and have we not done great injustice, both by allowing ourselves to be attracted by really bad men, who are witty and graceful, and to be repelled by really good men, because they happen to have neither tact nor humour? It is by the soul and not by any trick of speech that we ought to estimate our fellow man, and he who fears God

and loves his brother demands honour at our hands.

We may, however, be gravely concerned that manners in our day seem to be decaying, because there is reason to suspect that the cause is moral quite as much as social. We allow ourselves to treat our parents as our equals, to talk in public on unpleasant subjects, to argue with women beyond the point of due deference, to introduce politics and religion in general conversation, to bawl and shout, and generally to be loud in what we say and do. This is understood to show the liberty of modern life, when old-fashioned scruples and pedantic dignity have disappeared, and everybody has been emancipated — children from respect to their parents, youth from veneration

towards old age, men from chivalry towards women, and a man from the very respect of himself. Life is supposed to be brighter and more piquant, but yet with all the excellences which are assigned to the new man, and the new woman, and the new child (who is often the most offensive of the three), one may be pardoned a backward look of wistful regret to the gentleman of the olden time. Perhaps he was a trifle formal and tedious, but how admirable in his urbanity of speech, his service of women, his subordination to superiors, his graciousness to inferiors, and his unobtrusive reserve about the sanctities of life; and one remembers the lady of the olden times, so soft of voice, so winsome with her gracious ways, so per-

suasive of purity by her very face, so inspiring unto every noble deed by her very presence, who did not lift up her voice nor cause it to be heard in the street.

It is not wise as a rule to make comparisons between classes, but I am inclined to think that if it comes to the spirit of courtesy, which lies behind all manners, respectable working people, say our artisans and their wives, will make a better show than their masters and their wives. They will be less concerned about their own dignity — which is always a sign of vulgarity ; they will have more regard to the claims of other people ; they will be more anxious not to hurt another's feelings, and they will be quicker to render services in the little exigencies

of life ; and all this is the fruit of courtesy. Were any woman (and I count this a perfect test) travelling with a young child and some articles of luggage, it would be better for her as a rule to take a place in a third-class, rather than in a first-class carriage. The chances are that the richer people — unless they gathered from something she said or from her name upon a dressing-case that she was a person of distinction, in which case they would take any trouble in exact proportion to their own meanness — would eye her with displeasure, convey to her that the child was a nuisance, ignore the struggle with her luggage, and make her glad to leave the compartment. Were she to travel with an artisan and his wife, they would bid her

welcome, and make her feel at home, and anticipate her wants and encompass her with observances, because she was a lonely woman with a child. And the service of a woman and a child is more than manners — it is the climax of courtesy.

Courtesy is really doing unto others as you would be done unto, and the heart of it lies in a careful consideration for the feelings of other people. It comes from putting one's self in his neighbour's place, and trying to enter into his mind, and it demands a certain suppression of one's self, and a certain delicate sympathy with one's neighbour. So far as our abounding egotism reigns, we are bound to be discourteous, because we shall be so blindly immersed in our own affairs

that we cannot even see the things of others. So far as we break the bonds of self and project ourselves into the life of our brother man, we are bound to be courteous, because we shall now be interested in what is dear to him. This man also has a family and a business; this man also has had sicknesses and trials. Imagine! We must not therefore talk without ceasing about our children, our interests, our afflictions, our life. This man also has a church, and a creed, and opinions of his own, and a history. Remarkable! We must not, therefore, assume that our kind of religion, and our traditional views, and our favourite notions, and our particular set make the whole round world. This man beside us also has a hard fight with an unfavouring

world, with strong temptations, with doubts and fears, with wounds of the past which have skinned over, but which smart when they are touched. It is a fact, however surprising. And when this occurs to us we are moved to deal kindly with him, to bid him be of good cheer, to let him understand that we are also fighting a battle; we are bound not to irritate him, nor press hardly upon him nor help his lower self. We must feel as a brother towards the man beside us, and say to him the things that we should like to have said to us, and treat him as we should desire to be treated when our hands are hanging down and our hearts are heavy. And this is the very essence of courtesy.

Just because the machinery of life is so

apt to be heated, one keenly appreciates those who are ever deftly pouring in the cooling oil, by their patience and their tact, their sweetness and their sympathy. And one resents keenly that class of people who are honest and well meaning, but who are persistently discourteous and are not ashamed—I mean the man who is credited with what is called a bluff, blunt manner, and who credits himself with a special quality of downrightness and straightforwardness. He considers it far better to say what he thinks, and boasts that he never minces his words, and people make all kinds of excuses for him, and rather talk as if he were a very fine fellow, beside whom civil-spoken persons are little better than hypocrites. As a matter of fact, no one can calculate the pain this outspoken

gentleman causes in a single day, both in his family and outside. Nor have I ever been able to understand why he is praised, or even tolerated, and why he is not sharply dealt with as an offender against the social peace. He is said to deal faithfully with any person of whom he disapproves—it would be right to say he deals insolently; and what is called faithfulness is, generally, unpardonable impudence. “His bark,” it is said, “is worse than his bite,” and one hopes it may be, but I do not see what consolation it is for me, when this ill-mannered person barks at my heels, that he has not also bitten me. I object to his barking, and if he persists I am justified in using a stick. No man has any right to lecture his neighbour, or to intrude upon his neighbour’s privacy, or to wound

his neighbour's feelings, and when he does so in his rôle of the plain-spoken man, then he ought to be made to understand the difference between reality and rudeness and taught to keep a civil tongue in his head. No doubt there are occasions when courtesy is no longer an obligation, but practically they may be limited to a few experiences fortunately very rare in life. If any man should so forget himself as to speak disrespectfully of one's mother or one's wife, or if any one should set himself deliberately to insult one's religion, or if one should seek to lead a person from the paths of virtue, then it is not the time to pick one's speech, or to safeguard this ruffian's sensibility. "Get thee behind me, Satan," was what the Perfect Man said to His own friend when that friend was sug-

gesting that He should avoid the Cross, and we can say nothing stronger than that to a deliberate offender. There are times when the steel hand should be used without the velvet glove, when the strongest words of speech are called for, and in the end are the kindest.

Controversy, on the other hand, ought rather to be an opportunity for the most careful and generous courtesy. If any one differ from us in politics or religion, or in the affairs of business or our family, we are bound to believe that he loves truth as passionately, and desires to fulfil righteousness as fully, as we do, and that if in this matter he has not seen so clearly, yet that he is as religious, as intelligent, as high-principled, and as kind-hearted as we consider ourselves to be, or as, in our highest

moments, we really are. It is unpardonable to impute to an opponent mercenary motives of action, disloyalty to the common cause of goodness, indifference to the highest ends, and personal unworthiness of character. This is bad manners, and proves an inherent pettiness and squalor of soul—the moral narrowness of a man who cannot imagine goodness dissociated from his opinions, or carried out by other than his methods. Controversy is a severe trial of temper and character, but we ought to be thankful that if it has sometimes turned friends into enemies, it has also as often turned strangers into friends. There have been famous debates in history, wherein opponents have sent their articles, one to the other, before publication, that any unfair argument

might be noted and omitted, and in his own limited experience the writer can bear testimony that this honourable custom is still observed.

Surely there is no one who does not desire to live after the rule of courtesy, and there is no way of attaining this fine spirit except by keeping high company. Just as we live in the atmosphere of nobility, where people are generous, and chivalrous, and charitable, and reverent, shall we learn the habit of faultless manners, and acquire the mind which inspires every word and deed with grace. And the highest fellowship is open unto every man, and he that walks therein catches its spirit. For the very perfect knight of human history, who carried Himself without reproach from the cradle

to the grave, was our Lord and Master Christ, and the rudest who follow Him will take on the character of His gentleness.



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